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ABSTRACT

The first of six national educational goals, proclaimed by President Bush, to be accomplished by the year 2000 is that all children will start school ready to learn. This booklet examines this goal in terms of what it will take to ensure that all children develop the capacities or readiness to be successful in school. In the introduction, it is asserted that, for children and families to succeed in the lifelong process of learning, early childhood experiences both in and out of the home must be as personalized as possible. The first chapter looks at the early childhood years and the concept of school readiness. The second chapter explains why restructuring, rather than reform, of early childhood education is needed. A framework for providing comprehensive intervention services is discussed in the third chapter. The fourth chapter profiles programs in Missouri, Minnesota, and California that seek to broaden the role of schools in early childhood education. The fifth chapter examines curriculum issues intrinsic to a restructuring of early childhood education. The sixth chapter deals with appropriate methods for child assessment. In a concluding section, it is argued that services for children and families be coordinated, and that early childhood education be restructured to become personalized and family-centered (HTH)

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Restructuring Early Childhood Education

Michael F. Kelley, Elaine Surbeck

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The authors dedicate this fastback to the memory of Sandra Kelley Cox, an elementary principal who worked diligently with teachers and family support personnel to assist children and families in need.

Series Editor, Derek L. Burleson

Restructuring Early Childhood Education

by
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and
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Introduction

Throughout the 1980s a flurry of school reforms was initiated in most states, particularly after publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. The federal government joined forces with many state education agencies and school districts to implement such reform measures as teacher minimum competency testing, state-mandated pupil-assessment programs, and longer and more rigorous school days, to name a few, in the belief that greater accountability would provide the answer to the problems that beset our public education system. These top-down strategies for improving education were designed to enhance our competitive standing in the international community. As yet, few have yielded positive results.

To explain why so little changed during the 1980s, several policy analysts have suggested that the reforms essentially tinkered with the external components of the public education system while ignoring the internal relationships of the individuals involved in the proposed reforms. While additional standards and requirements were imposed on the system, little was done to involve teachers and administrators in deciding how to go about solving the problems they confront on a daily basis.

Today policy makers, educators, and the public at large continue to discuss and debate how to improve our public education system so that we do not remain "a nation at risk." The new focus is on school restructuring. Restructuring, unlike reform, suggests a complete over-

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haul in the ways schools are organized and operated. According to the American Association for School Administrators (Lewis 1989), restructuring:

- Is student- and teacher-centered.
- Changes the way students learn and teachers teach, requiring both to assume greater initiative.
- Applies to all students and all schools, not just the disadvantaged.
- Affects curriculum as well as organization.
- Needs a central vision within a school to which all involved subscribe.
- Requires becoming "unstuck" from many current reforms and from a built-up centralized bureaucracy.
- Is advocated by diverse interests in society.

In essence, school restructuring will require the direct involvement of those teachers, school leaders, students, and parents who experience and live with the daily problems. The goal is to empower these individuals at the school level so that they can re-examine their purposes and operational strategies in order to improve the quality of schooling for all.

In a complementary effort to the school restructuring movement, President Bush and the nation's governors met in early 1990 and proclaimed six national education goals to be accomplished by the year 2000. The first of the six goals is that all children in America will start school ready to learn. Interestingly, although all six of the goals were considered to be of high priority in the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, the first goal was the only one that even one-half of the respondents considered possible to accomplish (Elam 1990).

This fastback examines this first educational goal in terms of what it will take to ensure that all children develop the capacities or readiness to be successful in school. The construct of "readiness" as it relates to early schooling will be examined in both historical perspective

and its more contemporary usage. Moreover, we will consider some of the broad-based restructuring efforts that must occur in community schools if they are to be ready for children and families. Finally, we will argue for a personalized, integrated system of child and family education and social support services that extend beyond the traditional view of schooling. It is our belief that in order for children and families to truly succeed in the lifelong process of learning, the early childhood experiences spent in both home and out-of-home environments must be as personalized as possible. We see this as a basic challenge as we approach the year 2000.

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The Early Childhood Years and the Concept of Readiness

The past two decades have been witness to some of the most incredible social, political, and economic changes to confront our country since the launching of the Soviet satellite Sputnik in 1957. We currently have greater numbers of young children and single-parent families living in poverty than ever recorded previously. Indeed, the United States has the highest child poverty rate among eight leading industrialized nations (Children's Defense Fund 1991). The number of homeless children is on the rise. More single and married women with young infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children have entered the labor force than ever before in the history of our country, except for war-time periods. This has placed great demands on our nation's overburdened and inadequate system of child care. Prenatal care for the poor is limited; malnourishment, substance addiction, and AIDS significantly inhibits family functioning and severely constrains the educational future of those affected children.

Economically, the United States finds itself as a debtor nation dependent on the wealth of other countries such as Japan to help fund the national debt. This factor alone seriously undermines the capacity of our federal government to fund health care, child welfare and family support, food and nutrition programs, and education and training programs. In addition, many state and local budgets are constrained to the point that a number of child-support programs are facing retrenchment. Hence, needy families and their children will be with-

out support; and this alone will have an impact on their capacity to be ready for school.

The Readiness Concept

The concept of readiness is multifaceted, and how one defines it depends on how one views the nature of children and their development. On the one hand, readiness can be broadly viewed as the motivational, emotional, physical, and intellectual capacities that each child brings to a learning situation. Defined as readiness for learning, this perspective suggests that children bring varying levels of readiness capacity, which need to be nurtured (Kagan 1990). In contrast, a much narrower, finite view of readiness is that of school readiness. School readiness has been defined as, "the capacity to simultaneously learn and cope with the school environment" (Gesell Institute 1987, p. 7). This definition suggests that there is a predetermined set of capabilities that all children must have acquired before entering school, which clearly places the burden of proof on the child. Indeed, this appears to be what the President and the governors had in mind when they proposed the nation's first education goal.

When readiness is viewed in this way, one must assume that: a) the behaviors (or set of capabilities) identified are the most important ones; b) the development of these important behaviors is sequential, hierarchical, quite predictable, and therefore amenable to assessment; c) the assessment tool used to determine readiness is an accurate indicator of a child's status when compared chronologically to peers; and d) information culled from the developmental assessment can be used to predict future success or used for planning intervention experiences (Lidz 1991). As we will argue in the pages to follow, most of these assumptions regarding school readiness are questionable; and most placement and program decisions that result from this set of assumptions cause tremendous inequities for many children and their families.

Historical Perspective on Readiness

Historically, the school readiness construct as characterized above has its roots in the maturational perspective of Arnold Gesell and his colleagues at the Yale Clinic for Child Development. The Yale Clinic was one of the early child-development laboratories studying the nature and patterns of "normal" development from infancy through the early school years. Gesell and his colleagues studied the development of young Caucasian children through 60 months of age using psychological and observational techniques. Their work resulted in "developmental schedules" or typical patterns of growth and development in the areas of motor, language, adaptive, and personal-social behavior.

Gesell and his colleagues believed that the process of developmental change was genetically predetermined and linked to biological structures that need time to grow and mature. Thus, according to Gesellian maturational theory, the variable of time rather than experience was the most critical determinant of growth and behavior change. This belief subsequently lead to the concept of age-related behaviors or "developmental age." According to the Gesellian perspective, for most children chronological age and developmental age behavior patterns will be the same. However, for those children who have not had enough time to mature, developmental age patterns will not correspond to chronological age expectations. This disparity, according to the Gesell Institute, is the primary reason for early school failure.

The influence of Gesell's pioneering work in identifying normative patterns of development has been substantial. Many subsequently developed preschool and infant tests incorporated items from the Gesell profiles and employed some of his observational techniques when conducting assessments (Kelley and Surbeck 1991). The normative information supplied through Gesell's work has proved helpful when identifying possible areas for intervention through developmental assessment. Unfortunately, shortened versions of the profiles or sched-

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ules have also been used as selection tools or readiness gauges for entry into public school. In other words, these preschool tests, of which the Gesell School Readiness Screening Test is one, are being used to determine if children are functioning at the appropriate developmental level to succeed in school.

Inappropriate Readiness Assessment

In thousands of local early childhood settings, preschool and kindergarten-age children are being assessed for school readiness using the Gesell readiness tests or others like them. These tests typically assess multiple domains such as cognitive, language, fine and gross motor skills, and perceptual processing. Often the children are asked to copy shapes; identify letters, numbers, colors, body parts; discriminate left from right, as well as demonstrate auditory and visual functioning. In addition, some of the tests focus on the child's ability to cope with school expectations such as paying attention, listening to and following directions, and working with others. Information derived from these brief assessment episodes is then used to determine if entry into regular kindergarten should be delayed or if placement in a less demanding, extra-year "developmental" kindergarten program is in order. This practice assumes that what is being measured is predictive of school success or failure and that the resultant placement decision will improve the child's current status and future success. From both a measurement and social-policy perspective, this is highly questionable.

Several individuals have raised serious questions about the validity, reliability, and the theoretical underpinnings of these readiness tests, particularly the popular Gesell tests. Meisels (1987), Sheppard and Smith (1986), and Kelley and Surbeck (1991) have argued that the Gesell tests and many others like them lack the accuracy and consistency in predicting who might profit from schooling experience. For every child identified as "unready" for school, a ready or successful child was falsely identified.

Moreover, studies that have examined the effects of extra-year placements on young children's future academic performance suggest little to no improvement in long-term achievement or social outcomes. In other words, children who are assessed as "not ready" for kindergarten do not substantially improve their status by spending an extra year in a developmental kindergarten or other extra-year programs. This is disturbing given the fact that these extra-year programs usually cost as much or more than the conventional program that the child is legally eligible to attend. Sheppard and Smith (1986) argue, "Scientific knowledge underlying readiness assessment is such that none of the existing tests is sufficiently accurate to justify removing children from their normal peer group and placing them in special two-year programs. In part the lack of high correlations with later school success is caused by the instability of the very traits we are seeking to measure" (p. 183).

Instead of expecting time to work its magic and the child is mature enough to undertake the tasks presented to him (and it usually is a poor, minority male who is deemed not ready), would it not be more appropriate to adjust the level and demands of the schooling tasks and experiences to meet the needs of each child? From this perspective, all children are viewed as naturally inquisitive learners in need of well-designed environments and sensitive adults to foster growth and development. This shifts the responsibility to the school and avoids penalizing the child for lack of opportunity (Kagan 1990). Moreover, family members also could be included in the education process. As we shall see later, parent education and involvement in the early educational experiences of their children is a significant contributor to early school success. Finally, it has been suggested that schools and neighborhood agencies collaborate to provide a coordinated network of complete child and family resource and support services (Kirst 1991).

This conception meshes with the growing body of early intervention research conducted over the past 20 years, which has demonstrated that high quality, early childhood programs that are child- and

family-centered and age appropriate have a positive impact on the future school success of children, particularly those from less advantaged situations.

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Why the Need for Restructuring in Early Childhood Education?

Our early education system can no longer afford to look at the concept of readiness from an exclusionary perspective. To make early schooling available only to those most likely to succeed and to ignore the clearly evident needs of those considered least likely to demonstrate success is short-sighted social policy, given what we know about the positive effects of early social and educational intervention.

Early intervention cost-benefit data have clearly demonstrated that investments in children's programs saves dollars in the long term, dollars that would have to be spent to remediate more severe problems later. For example, according to the Children's Defense Fund (1991), $1 spent on childhood immunizations saves $10 in later medical costs; $1 spent on comprehensive prenatal care saves more than $3 in later health costs; and $1 for quality preschool saves $4.75 for later costs associated with special education, crime, and welfare. Also documented are the cost benefits of compensatory education, housing assistance and support services, job corps, and family preservation services. In each case, dollars invested up front in education and human services tend to return far greater savings over the long haul and have proven far more effective than remediation efforts.

Among the various facets of restructuring, a number are focused at the school or classroom level, such as a developmentally appropriate and integrated curriculum, multi-age grouping, parent education, and new roles for teachers and administrators. In addition to the school

and classroom focus, restructuring from a community human-services perspective also is necessary. It is the belief of a number of early childhood educators and policy analysts (Kagan 1989, 1990; Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, and Zigler 1987; Surbeck and Kelley 1990; Kirst 1991; and Mitchell 1989) that the time has come to reconceptualize our current, fragmented system of child and family services. In examining recent calls for local, community-oriented, collaborative ventures, a number of common elements have emerged as being critical for successful implementation.

No discussion of restructuring early childhood education is complete without including the broader issue of child and family well-being. If our nation is serious about ensuring that all children begin school ready to learn by the year 2000, then a framework for establishing comprehensive, integrated services for children and families must be developed and instituted rapidly. Underlying this argument is the belief that health, nutrition, family conditions, and educational outcomes are interrelated. One cannot separate and treat just one dimension (such as age-appropriate programs) and expect that family and child functioning will be greatly enhanced. Since the effects of risk are cumulative and rise in geometric proportions, the treatment of such difficulties requires a comprehensive, integrated approach. Restructuring must proceed on many fronts simultaneously.

Today, large numbers of young children and families find themselves in precarious situations. Poverty, poor health, and lack of early child-care options seriously diminish children's capacity to be ready for school. While most local and state governments are aware of this, their response to the problem has been a fragmented and highly inefficient system for meeting child and family needs. Most state governments offer multiple programs for children and families, usually distributed throughout a dozen or more state agencies, each with its own budget and personnel. In Arizona, for example, it is not uncommon for a family in need of economic and health assistance to have to visit a half-dozen different offices in order to obtain help.

In states with larger populations, the fragmentation of services is even greater.

Fragmentation is just one of many weaknesses of our current service-delivery system. Additional problems include: primary focus on emergency situations rather than on prevention; services that are episodic or discontinuous and do not follow the life course of the needy child, service gaps such as no health insurance, inequities in services that are offered within various local jurisdictions, and no performance accountability.

Moreover, debate continues in the early childhood arena about the roles and functions of early care versus early education. Until recently, early care has been viewed as a completely separate function from early education. With the recent passage of the federal Elementary and Secondary School Amendments of 1988 (continuation of Chapter 1), the Family Support Act of 1988 (welfare reform), the Hawkins Human Services Reauthorization Act of 1990 (Head Start and other human services), and the 1990 budget reconciliation process that produced the new child-care package, the distinction between care and education is becoming increasingly blurred. It is time the early childhood community acted in concert to rectify this confusion, because it will only continue to fragment an already undersupported system.

An additional concern is that public policy for children's programs as well as appropriated funding for these programs have grown without an overall plan or strategic design. Given these issues, what practical steps can be taken to provide personalized, comprehensive services that will help children become ready for school? Some answers are provided in the next section.

A Framework for Providing Comprehensive Services

When restructuring early childhood care and education into a comprehensive and personalized system, a number of organizational, policy, and legal questions arise. The first relates to governance. How can a system be governed to ensure continuity and comprehensiveness? How should services be grouped in order to prevent fragmentation and to focus on prevention? How can the system ensure equity and accountability, while protecting the confidentiality of those involved. Each of these questions poses significant challenges and difficulties.

Forming local community planning councils with representatives from education, medical, human services, mental health, and business groups has been recommended by the National Association of State Boards of Education (1988), Children's Defense Fund (1991), Kagan et al. (1987), and Kirst (1991), among others. The goal of these planning councils is to develop collaborative strategies for identifying community needs and for delivering comprehensive, integrated programs to families and children. This will require gathering considerable information about the status of children and their families in local areas. Some communities will no doubt have a much greater need for coordinated child and family services than others and thus will need more time to phase in appropriate programs.

If planning councils are to be effective, states, counties, and municipalities will need to examine their current statutes and regulations

governing licensure, funding patterns, and interagency agreements. Ideally, state-level planning bodies comprised of representatives from various agencies would be established with the authority (and funding) to assist local councils as they plan for phasing in integrated services.

A number of states, including New Jersey, Illinois, Iowa, New York, and Virginia, have established state-level offices to coordinate collaborative planning for a vast array of child and family support services (Kirst 1991; Mitchell and Cunningham 1990). Moreover, with the passage of P.L. 99-457 (the Education of the Handicapped Amendments, Title I, Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Handicaps), every state in the country has now established a state-level interagency coordinating council to plan and coordinate services for young handicapped children and their families.

California and Minnesota have established governance mechanisms that allow this coordination to occur. In both states interagency coordinating councils have been established to prepare joint-powers agreements so that comprehensive services can be designed and delivered cost effectively. The Minnesota Youth Coordinating Board has the authority to levy additional property taxes, if needed, to improve services. The California legislature created the State Interagency Children's Services Coordinating Board to assist counties in developing interagency councils. New Jersey's School-Based Youth Services Programs are located at or near secondary schools. These programs provide health and substance-abuse services, counseling, employment training, and information and referral services. Other options available in many of the programs include family planning, teen parenting, day care, and recreation. In order to obtain funding, school districts must work collaboratively with public/private community agencies.

At the federal level, the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced in the spring of 1991 a major reorganization combining the maternal and child health block-grant programs, currently under the U.S. Public Health Service, with HHS child welfare and

social services programs. As outlined in the *Federal Register* (18 April 1991), the new agency, called Administration for Children and Families, will have a budget of $27 billion. Moreover, the reauthorization legislation for Head Start and other human-services programs established new coordinating requirements among agencies serving Head Start children and their families. Thus at every level we are seeing a push toward interagency collaboration.

Grouping a number of services at one site or hub helps to eliminate fragmentation. It makes good sense to provide medical and dental care, nutritional services, social services, various forms of child care and preschool programs, and transportation at a site that is convenient to families and children. Local schools could serve as sites, as could churches, Head Start centers, or other community-based organizations.

The federally funded Head Start program, designed to serve children from low-income families, has proven to be one of the most successful comprehensive child-development programs. Many of the 1,283 programs have direct links to local public schools. Head Start provides parent-involvement opportunities, health services, nutritional services, and social services to improve family life. Reauthorized in 1990, Head Start currently serves about 500,000 preschool children. Recent Head Start initiatives include the development of intensive and comprehensive services for infants and toddlers and their families through Parent-Child Centers, where there also is a focus on family literacy.

The major challenge to providing comprehensive services at a community hub is making these services available to all who need them. Currently, access to programs is severely limited. For example, Head Start is currently funded for only about 20% of eligible children. Fortunately, the reauthorized Hawkins Bill is designed to remedy this situation within five years, provided Congress appropriates full funding. The fact remains, however, that many children never obtain the needed health and nutritional services or the early educational experiences that are the foundation for school success.

Since historically the public schools have operated to serve all children, we see them as the most likely sites for delivery of services. One advantage of using local schools as service delivery hubs is that they already have links to the community. Moreover, many schools have the human and technical resources to help implement the comprehensive package of services. For example, most schools systems now have computers and the personnel to operate them. This will be useful in accounting for expenditures under interagency funding agreements.

Computers also will be useful for developing and maintaining child and family-service plans. These plans would be similar to the Individualized Family Service Plan requirements of P.L. 99-457. The plan could include a statement of a family's strengths and needs, specific outcomes for the child and family, specific early interventions to meet child and family needs, anticipated procedures, dates and times for implementing services, and the person responsible for managing the case and coordinating the services.

Ideally, this family-service plan would incorporate a family enablement model that has been used successfully with families of handicapped children (Dunst, Trivette, and Deal 1988). The intent of the model is to focus on family strengths rather than deficits. Rather than doing for the family, the approach is to promote family competence by helping families assess their own needs and learn how to use the coordinated services so that eventually they can do for themselves.

For purposes of program assessment, the computer network could be used for documenting and monitoring family-service plans, with the database configured for large-scale evaluation analyses. Ideally, the computer network would allow the family and child data to be portable, following the family if it moves to another community. Such computer models already exist, for example, the Migrant Student Record Transfer System.

Confidentiality of information must be maintained, of course. Thus procedural guidelines will be necessary to protect the child and fami-

ly. The field of special education has dealt effectively with the issue of confidentiality and parents' rights for two decades. Much can be learned from the the legal and operational guidelines that have proven effective in special education.

All the recommendations in our framework for providing comprehensive services for young children will require a financial commitment from local, state, and federal levels. The Children's Defense Fund (1989) identifies a variety of potential funding sources. Some of these include eliminating capital gains tax breaks for inherited wealth (saving $5 billion annually), raising taxes on ozone-depleting chemicals and hazardous wastes ($2 billion to $3 billion annually), eliminating some of the military's pet projects that have proven so far to be unworkable ($4 billion annually for several years), and ceasing to forgive loans for foreign military sales (approximately $4 billion per year).

In June 1991, a new status report on children and families was released by the National Commission on Children (*Congressional Quarterly*, 29 June 1991). Calling for a commitment of up to $56 billion to the future of young children, the report recommends a $1,000 tax deduction for each child in America.

Unfortunately, President Bush and his advisors have claimed that our country cannot afford the price tag. It is unconscionable for our country's leaders to suggest that our future resources are unaffordable. As has been documented throughout this fastback, the needs of children and families are enormous. Without appropriate intervention and carefully crafted prevention, these needs will not be met. Without a substantial financial commitment to children and families, the National Goals for Education will become nothing more than rhetoric.

Broadening the School's Role in Early Childhood Education

Restructuring early childhood education calls for broadening the scope of the school's responsibilities and for changes in teachers' roles. A key element in restructuring is personalizing the early childhood program by fostering a caring climate in which staff come to know the children and their families intimately. Following are descriptions of three programs in Missouri, Minnesota, and California that illustrate how public schools are taking on broader responsibilities and teachers are assuming new roles that personalize the care and education of young children.

Missouri's New Parents as Teachers Program

New Parents as Teachers (NPAT) is a program sponsored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Initiated in 1984, the program is operated by local school districts. It provides parents and even expectant parents with information on child growth and development, offers health and developmental screenings for children, and arranges monthly home visits from parent educators and monthly group meetings for parents at nearby parent resource centers. These broadened services for infants and toddlers are based on the premise that parent involvement is critical in the child's early education. Evaluation of the program has demonstrated success in developing children's intellectual, language, and social capabilities.

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In particular, parent participation with trained parent educators during home visits has proven to be a potent strategy for developing children's capabilities (Pfannenstiel and Seltzer 1989).

Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education Program

With a rationale similar to NPAT, the Minnesota legislature funded in 1974 a program to support parents as children's first and most influential teachers. The Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program is administered by Community Education, a program office within the Minneapolis Public Schools. The program is conducted at neighborhood ECFE centers and involves children (birth through kindergarten) and parents in twice-weekly activity sessions. These activity sessions are followed by support and discussion sessions for parents, while the children are cared for in small groups. In addition, the ECFE centers are linked to special services for families, such as special education personnel, social workers, speech therapists, and a variety of services from participating agencies. Equity is not an issue since ECFE services are available to all children in Minneapolis.

Although longitudinal data are not yet available to document the program's impact, the fact that this program increased from 6 pilot programs to more than 300 programs statewide clearly indicates its acceptance in meeting family needs. For a more complete review of these and other programs, see Warger (1988).

These public school-based programs clearly demonstrate that, although different in organization, they can forge supportive networks that enhance family functioning and children's later performance in school. When a personalized, family-oriented approach provides consistent support for young children, the outcomes are positive.

Integrated Child Care in Pomona, California

Early childhood education cannot be separated from the the crucial issue of child care. Any restructuring plan will have to consider

how quality child care can be integrated into the broader spectrum of early childhood services. A model exists for this kind of integration in the Pomona Unified School District's Child Development Program. This comprehensive program provides the following:

- Child care in a variety of settings for about 900 children ranging from infants to adolescents.
- Year-round child care available seven days a week from 6:00 a.m. to midnight
- Sick child-care services for mildly ill children.
- Head Start and state preschool programs.
- School-age Parenting/Infant Development program for teen parents.
- School-age child-care services before and after school.
- Child-care food program.
- Resource and referral system providing information on home day-care options.
- Respite care for families in crisis.

The Pomona program is supervised by a full-time administrator, a coordinator, and a program assistant. School principals are involved in the Head Start supervision, lead teachers direct the programs and staff in the child-care centers (Warger 1988).

Pomona's resource and referral service providing information on home day-care options raises several possibilities for cooperation with the school. Home day-care providers could be linked with the public schools through closed-circuit interactive video classes, cable TV, or mobile libraries. If located near the school, home day-care sites also could serve older children before and after school. Resource personnel and the care providers might be teachers on special assignment, for example, those on maternity leave or retired from full-time teaching, or those who want to work in a different role under the school district umbrella.

Although teachers currently trained in accredited early childhood programs tend to choose K-3 positions in public schools because the pay is better, many have the experience and background to work with younger children in various settings. Giving early childhood teachers more professional options fits with the National Association for the Education of Young Children's guidelines for creating a career ladder within the field (Willer 1990). Some of these professional options carry such titles as Family Advocate, Early Childhood Family Education Specialist, Parent Educator, Social Worker, or Case Manager. Regardless of the title, all of these positions call for an advocacy role with children and families.

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Curriculum Issues in Restructuring Early Childhood Education

In a restructured early childhood classroom, the curriculum is child-centered and developmentally appropriate (Bredekamp 1987). The curriculum emerges from the interests of children and is learned from direct experience with materials and with other children and adults. In this conception, children are viewed as active constructors of their own knowledge. Children work in flexible spaces where on-going projects are housed. The notion of classroom space is broadened to include the library, outdoors, and community locations.

Characteristics of the curriculum in a restructured early childhood program include the following:

1. Curriculum is reflective of the needs and interests of children in a particular group; it is not taught the same way to groups of children year after year.
2. Curriculum builds on shared and familiar content; it is flexible and negotiated with children.
3. Curriculum is integrated across content areas and organized around themes or projects requiring active learning.
4. Curriculum content has intellectual integrity and is both meaningful and worthwhile for children to know.
5. Curriculum respects and supports the individual, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the children and their families.
6. Curriculum emphasizes the value of learning through social interaction with peers and adults (NAEYC, NAECS/SDE, 1991)

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These curriculum characteristics have implications for the role of teachers in restructured early childhood programs. Rather than being dispensers of knowledge, teachers must be observant and knowledgeable about children and skilled in interacting with young learners in facilitative ways.

One of the best ways teachers can facilitate young children's learning is by addressing meaningful problems in the school and larger community through project activity. With projects that combine content and social action, young children learn meaningful knowledge and come to recognize that, through their own cooperative action, they are able to help others. An example of a project combining content and social action is a study of the elderly and the aging process by a second-grade class (Glover and Sheppard 1989).

The content of this project emerged out of an earlier study of the human body. Children were interested in the processes of aging, wondering what caused grey hair, wrinkles, and eventually death. The children began to understand these ideas by sharing their observations, insights, and experiences, which were elaborated and enriched by such stories such as *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*, *Nana Upstairs*, *Nana Downstairs*, and *Tales of a Gambling Grandma*. They also began visiting a local nursing home on a weekly basis. Prior to visiting the nursing home, the children simulated some of the physical conditions nursing home residents endure, such as impaired vision or the inability to walk; and they discussed other characteristics the elderly might display.

On each visit the children and residents were paired for a variety of activities. Sometimes children interviewed residents about their lives; they played games, drew pictures, and wrote stories. In large groups, they sang songs, shared refreshments, and talked. Children and residents alike became quite fond of one another; some children and the teacher continued the visits throughout the summer vacation. Children were profoundly affected when the oldest Hispanic resident was finally able to communicate with them through a Spanish-speaking

student teacher. The subject of aging and death became much more understandable when Wistano and a few other residents died.

The depth and richness of knowledge the children gained through participation in this social-service project was displayed through the stories and poems they wrote. A project such as this demonstrates clearly how early childhood education can address human and social concerns as well as academic ones. With experiences such as these, children learn to understand and value diversity in a very personal way.

The guideline of attending to cultural diversity in the early childhood curriculum becomes critical as more and more children from culturally different backgrounds enter our schools. In some parts of our country, for example, language-minority children are, or soon will be, the majority. Bowman (1989) has suggested the following principles for teaching culturally different children.

1. Teachers should become knowledgeable of developmentally equivalent patterns of behavior, for example, recognizing when children have accomplished the developmental task of learning a primary language, whether it be Spanish, French, or English.
2. Teachers should accept multiple ways of achieving developmental tasks and refrain from valuing one way over another.
3. Teachers should help construct a curriculum that respects cultural variations, while at the same time acknowledging human similarities.
4. Teachers should work with parents in interpreting the curriculum and instructional practices. It is the teacher's responsibility to help parents fully understand the importance of the content and skills that are taught.

Teachers' acceptance of diversity should be modeled in their own behavior. This means examining their own biases, valuing the uniqueness of all children, allowing children different amounts of time to

learn a second language, accepting and enhancing all children's efforts to communicate, valuing the children's native language rather than trying to replace it with English, providing a rich environment for all types of language and social interchange, and incorporating varied cultural experiences for all children (Soto 1991).

Closely related to curriculum is how instruction is organized. In the restructured early childhood program, consideration should be given to reducing class size and incorporating mixed-age grouping in classrooms. As Katz, Evangelou, and Hartman (1990) state, "We need not educate children as if they were born in litters." Some of the reported benefits of mixed-age grouping include:

1. Interage socialization is more family-like. This is increasingly important given the large amounts of time that young children spend in out-of-home settings due to parent employment.
2. Positive social behaviors such as helpfulness, sharing, and cooperation increase. Additionally, social interaction and participation tend to increase in mixed-age groupings.
3. Mixing older and younger children stimulates cognitive activity, which can have a positive effect both academically and socially.
4. Mixed-age grouping causes teachers to rethink the rigid, age-specific curricula. This can result in the design of a more developmentally appropriate curricula.
5. Mixed-age grouping allows children to progress at their own pace; placing teachers in the position of finding out what each child knows and how each child learns best (Katz, Evangelou, and Hartman 1990).

Taken together, the organization, curriculum, and instructional changes that are being recommended here call for far greater autonomy in decision making for teachers, administrators, parents, and community support personnel. To make effective decisions will require considerable training in child development and early childhood

practices. Moreover, training in counseling and use of support services will enhance the effectiveness of early childhood personnel. Mentoring by experienced early childhood and family-service professionals is another avenue for training.

Many administrators have not had training or experience in working in an early childhood setting where a comprehensive set of services is delivered. They will need training in management-related functions such as securing and allocating resources, evaluating program and staff, and coordinating services. Because many of these functions are shared under a collaborative governance structure, administrators must become skillful in team building, motivating, facilitating, and managing conflict. Knowledge of appropriate early childhood education and care is a requisite for this type of shared leadership.

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Assessment in Early Childhood Settings

Assessing the work children do is an essential function of the schools. Appropriate assessment in the early childhood years requires a comprehensive understanding of the individual child's progress and capability in order that a personalized educational plan can be created. What is not appropriate in these early years is the use of standardized tests or other deficit-based assessment approaches (NAEYC 1988; Perrone 1991).

One useful approach for early childhood teachers is the Descriptive Review Process developed by Pat Carini and colleagues (1986). In this approach, teachers and support staff meet to study specific children and their behavior. Prior to the group meeting, the child's teacher prepares a set of relevant questions about the child to help focus the discussion. Then the child's teacher presents information about the child's physical presence, dispositional behavior, relationships with other children and adults, preferred activities and interests, and the child's approach to learning. (Parents also can be invited to contribute their observations and insights at the presentation.) Upon completion of the teacher's presentation, other staff are asked for relevant information that might yield insight into the nature of the child. This could include previous school experience, medical information, and any information shared by the family for school use. When the sharing of information is concluded, the person chairing the review restates the initial question(s) and solicits recommendations. Once

recommendations are made, the chair, with input from the group, critiques the recommendations and prepares for follow-up. The shared insight that emanates from this review process often results in changed perceptions of the child's behavior and many suggestions for responding to a child's needs.

In addition to group discussions about specific children, the projects that children engage in can serve as a means for assessing their progress. As children undertake their projects, they negotiate rules, establish routines for working together, and plan activities – all of which serve as indicators of social development. As children become engaged in the projects, the teacher can maintain a journal to record observations, insights, and questions. Katz and Chard (1989) state that many evaluation opportunities occur when the children plan a culminating event for sharing with family and friends what they have learned from their project. Video or audiotaped group presentations or photos of project work at various stages can be examined for important learning outcomes. When authentic sources of children's work are used for assessment, then the assessment process reflects the ongoing life of the classroom.

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Conclusion

In this fastback, we have recommended new forms of collaboration and shared responsibility among early childhood educators, parents, and community support agencies in behalf of young children and their families. We have argued that the current fragmentation of services for children and families must be coordinated under a comprehensive plan designed to serve the health, nutritional, social, and educational needs of children. With regard to the concept of readiness, we made the point that it is as much the responsibility of the schools to become ready for children as it is for children to become ready for school.

We have described how through the establishment of early childhood school/community hubs, comprehensive services can be provided to all who need them. Prenatal care, child immunizations, health screenings, and nutrition assistance could all be conveniently located within the hub rather than spread across a variety of agencies in different locations.

We believe that child care, preschool, and early primary education should be restructured to become personalized, family-centered, and developmentally appropriate. These restructuring efforts will require significant changes in governance structure, regulations, and funding. They also will require additional training for teachers and administrators.

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There are a few examples of school districts that have implemented comprehensive early childhood care and education. Yet, with no national policy for care and education of young children and only a few state-level models for comprehensive, integrated services, much remains to be done to ensure that by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn. Let us begin.

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